

Ripple Effect: Extract

‘DOCTOR!’ Ace shouted.

The Doctor looked up and froze, but only momentarily.

The Dalek hadn’t seen him yet, so the Doctor seized his opportunity. He grabbed the quantum stabiliser out of his pocket, flicked it to the ‘High’ setting and pointed it at the intruder. The Dalek must have seen him in its peripheral vision, but just as it started to turn the Doctor activated the stabiliser. There was a high-pitched whine and a beam of light shot out of the end, bathing the Dalek in a violet glow. The Dalek’s eye and arms drooped immediately and its momentum left it coasting across the floor until it bumped gently into the console and stayed still.

‘Blimey! That was close. Is it dead?’ Ace was having trouble catching her breath.

‘No,’ the Doctor replied. ‘Just stunned. A quantum stabiliser isn’t exactly a weapon.’ He stood for a moment looking at the disabled Dalek. ‘Very odd! It doesn’t seem to have a weapon.’

Surprised, Ace came closer to look. ‘Oh yeah, no ray gun.’

Instead of having the usual manipulator arm on the right and a ray gun capable of hurling lethal energy bolts on its left-hand side, this Dalek just had two manipulator arms.

More noises from outside jolted the Doctor out of his analysis. ‘We have to get the door closed.’ He moved past Ace and raised the quantum stabiliser again. ‘There may be more of them.’

But before he could reach the door, a small crowd of children of assorted alien races rushed in and he was left brandishing the tool directly in the face of a tall, pretty dark-brown-skinned girl of about fifteen years old, who had intricate multicoloured markings of tiny birds

round her hairline and running down the sides of her neck. The Doctor tried to peer round her to see if the children were being pursued by metal monsters, but the girl side-stepped in front of him so he could see nothing.

‘What did you do?’ she demanded. Her expression was equal parts anger and concern.

‘I ... er ...’

‘Did you hurt him?’ The girl pointed at the disabled Dalek.

‘Him?’ echoed the Doctor. ‘Did I hurt *him*? My dear girl, did he hurt you?’

‘I can see from your ship that you’re a Time Lord, but are you an idiot as well?’ she asked, after glancing around. ‘And give me that!’ She snatched the quantum stabiliser out of the Doctor’s hand like a teacher confiscating a dangerous toy from a naughty child. With another scathing look, she joined the other children huddled round the Dalek, touching it and running their hands over the metal as if stroking a wounded kitten.

The Doctor wasn’t the only one to be totally confused. Ace had never, *ever* seen anyone show a Dalek affection. Before either of them could say anything else, three more Daleks arrived. Two of them approached their disabled comrade, while the third hung back, effectively blocking the door. Fortunately, none of these was armed either, though their manipulator arms were still powerful enough to crush a human skull like a hen’s egg.

Now that more Daleks had arrived, the girl turned back to confront the Doctor. ‘What are you?’ she asked. ‘Some kind of thug?’

The Doctor’s mouth fell open. For once he was lost for words.

‘Well?’ she pressed. ‘What possible excuse can you have for attacking a defenceless Dalek?’